SOS: Teachers say there is too much administrative work and stress in schools

Save our Schools: Education Research Brief

Over half of all secondary school teachers in Australia report that they have too much administrative work which takes away time for preparing for classes and is a major source of stress. Nearly one quarter say they experience a lot of stress at school. These are amongst the highest proportions in the OECD. They are significant factors behind teachers leaving the profession.

Australian teachers also have less professional autonomy over classroom content and assessment than in other OECD countries, but there is more professional collaboration in Australian schools. However, a majority of teachers do not believe their profession is valued by society.

These are key results from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), an international survey of school teachers, school leaders and the learning environment in schools released this month. The report provides important insights into the state of the teaching profession in Australia and other countries.

The percentage of Australian teachers who report they have too much administrative work and experience a lot of stress is above the OECD average. Fifty-five per cent of Australian teachers say they have too much administrative work compared to 49% across the OECD [Chart 1]. This is the 10th highest percentage in the OECD. Too much administrative work is the major source of stress amongst Australian secondary teachers.

Twenty-four per cent of secondary teachers in Australia say they experience a lot of stress at work compared to 18% for the OECD [Chart 2]. This is the 7th highest percentage in the OECD.

Too much administrative work and acute stress are factors influencing teacher mobility and attrition. Teacher attrition may affect student achievement by having a negative impact on the school climate and on the curriculum. Attrition can also lead to significant financial costs for education systems because of the need to replace qualified teachers in affected schools.

On average across the OECD countries and others participating in TALIS, teachers who report experiencing stress in their work “a lot” are twice as likely as colleagues with lower levels of stress to report that they will stop working as teachers in the next five years. In Australia, teachers who report experiencing stress at their work “a lot” are 90% more likely to want to leave teaching in the next five years.

In Australia, 22% of teachers report that they would like to leave teaching within the next five years compared to the OECD average of 25%. Twenty-five per cent of teachers in Australia would like to change to another school if that were possible compared to the OECD average of 20%. On average across the OECD, teachers who would like to change to another school are less satisfied with the profession, did not pick teaching as a first-choice career and are slightly younger and less experienced in their current school than other teachers.

The survey results point to the need for much greater support for teachers in schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged students in Australia. Teacher stress is much higher in schools with higher concentrations of students from low socio-economic status families. About 32% of teachers in secondary schools with more than 30% of students from low SES homes report “a lot” of stress compared to 22% in schools with less than 30% of students from such homes. The gap of 10 percentage points is by far the largest in the OECD.

As a result, much larger percentages of teachers in schools with higher concentrations of students from disadvantaged homes would like to change schools if it were possible. Thirty-five per cent of teachers in secondary schools with more than 30% of students from low SES homes would like to change schools compared to 23% in schools with less than 30% of students from such homes

Australian teachers also report lower levels of professional autonomy as regards course content and student assessment than the average for the OECD. In Australia, 73% of teachers report having control over determining course content in their class, compared to 84% on average across OECD countries. Eighty-seven per cent have control over student assessment compared to 94% for the OECD. However, 96% have control over teaching methods which is the same for the OECD.

Professional collaboration provides a foundation for effective teaching practices and although it is low across OECD countries, it is higher in Australia than in most OECD countries. In Australia, 39% of teachers report participating in collaborative professional learning at least once a month compared to the OECD average of 21%. This is the 4th highest percentage in the OECD. There is less team teaching in Australia than in the OECD average with 23% of Australian teachers engaging in team teaching compared to 28% in the OECD.

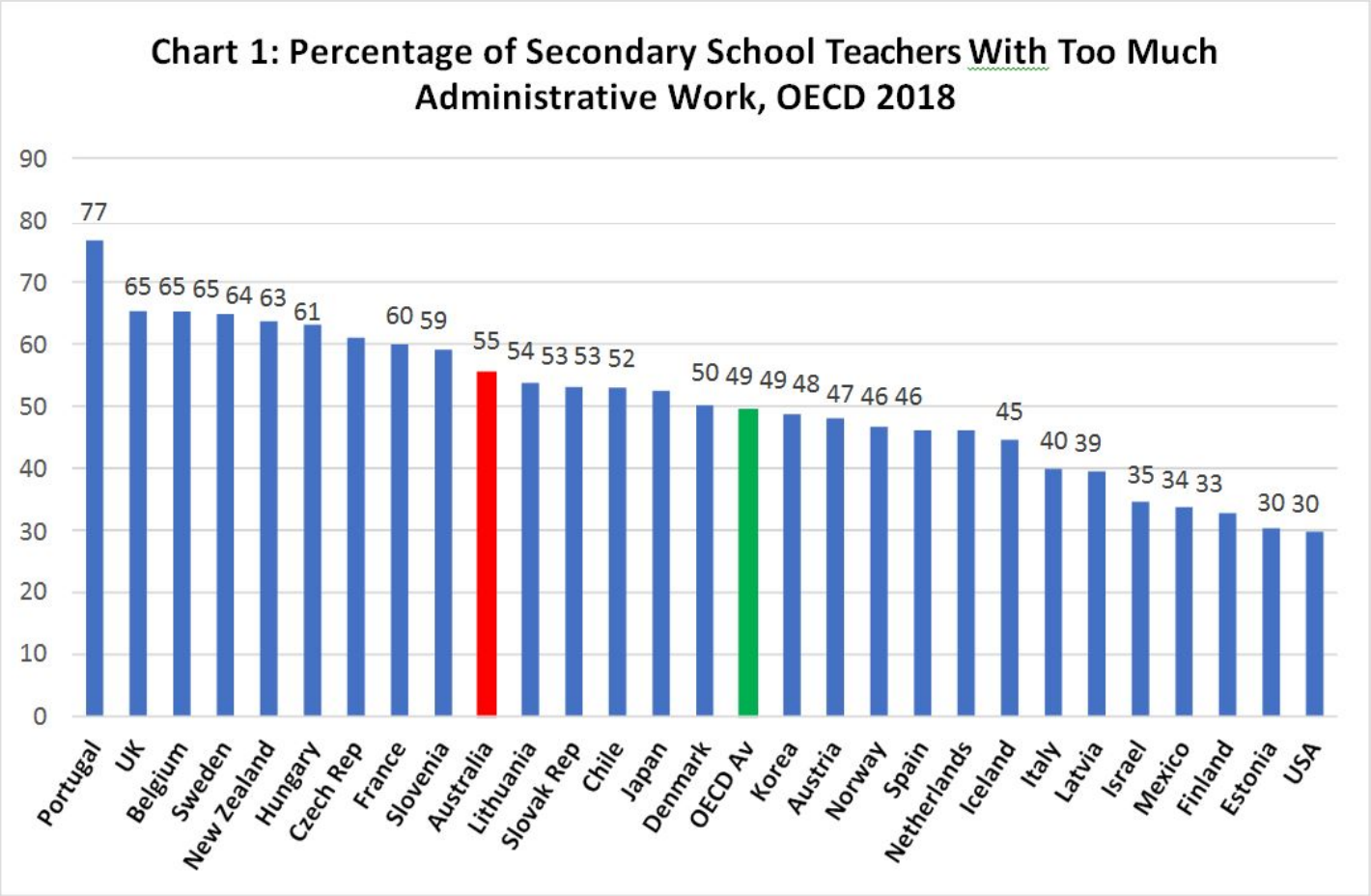
In Australia, 86% of teachers have a permanent contract compared to 82% in the OECD. At the same time, 10% of teachers in Australia are employed on contracts of one year or less, which is lower than the average of 12% in the OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS. In the last five years in Australia, the proportion of teachers with a contract of one year or less has remained stable.

Most teachers across the OECD don’t feel valued by society. Only 45% of secondary teachers in Australia believe that their profession is valued by society, but this Is much higher than the average for the OECD of just 26%. The Australian proportion is the 3rd highest in the OECD, behind Korea with 67% and Finland with 58%. It has also increased from 39% in 2013.

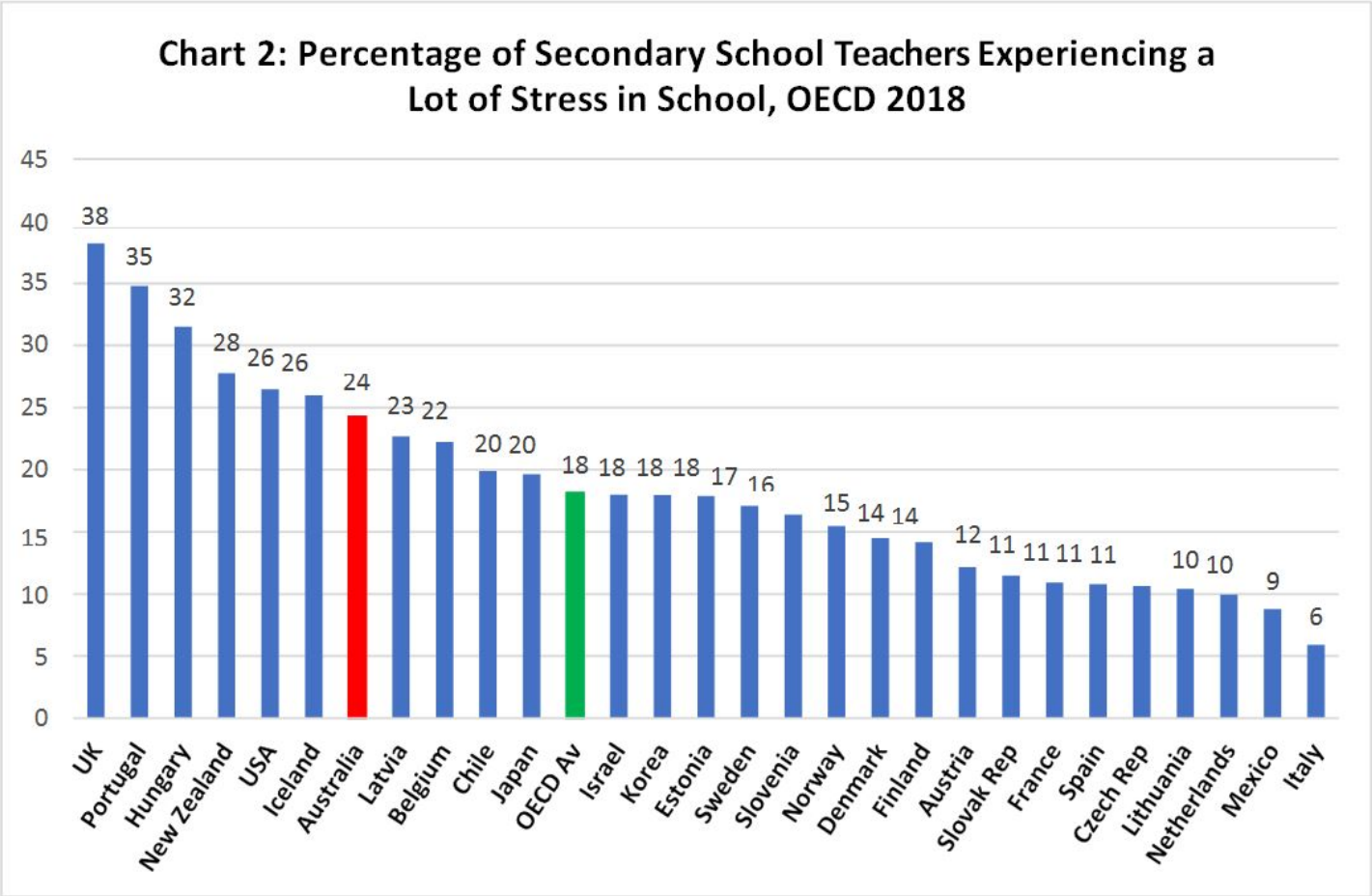
Overall, 90% of teachers are satisfied with their job which is the same as the OECD average. Moreover, 78% of teachers are satisfied with the terms of their teaching contract (apart from salary), which is above the OECD average of 66%. Also, 67% of teachers report being satisfied with their salaries, which is much higher than the OECD average of 39%.

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Trevor Cobbold, National Convenor

SOS - Fighting for Equity in Education
http://www.saveourschools.com.au
https://twitter.com/SOSAust
saveourschools690@gmail.com



Source: TALIS 2018, Online Table II.2.46.



Source: TALIS 2018, Online Table II.2.39.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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